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RESEARCH ARTICLE

"People are God" Third World Internationalism and Chinese Muslims in the Making of the National Recognition in the 1950s

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of Islam, particularly the Chinese Muslim scholars' participation in the nation-building of the People's Republic of China. It also looks at the political narrative of the CCP on Islam in the context of the Chinese revolution. Anti-imperialism and socialist construction were the two primary political goals allowing people to be politically engaged and consequently create a common ground for recognition. Hence, religion was considered as merely another form of ideology which needed to be incorporated into the political mission leading toward human liberation. The internationalist support of the anti-colonial struggles in the Arab World also played a crucial role in the formation of the national recognition in the 1950s. The reports on the Chinese political support towards the Arab world presented the Arab people as a unity with their revolutionary spirit rooted in Islamic religious tradition and inspired by their recent history of being oppressed by colonialism.

Keywords

Third world • National recognition • Colonialism • Chinese Muslims • Civilization

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Introduction

On October 24 1952, readers of the *People's Daily* across China saw the news about a 'Chinese Muslim *Hajj* delegation returned to Beijing from Pakistan on October 5th'. During their stay in Pakistan, the delegates received 'a warm welcome' and 'attended banquets hosted by Egyptian ambassador and Saudi Envoy to Pakistan'. Their arrival was 'extensively covered by the Karachi local newspapers'. The delegates also introduced the 'reality about the significant improvement of the ethnic equality, religious freedom, and the living conditions of all ethnic groups believing in Islam'.[2] Buried underneath the news on Korean War, this brief report might seem inconspicuous. After all, this was merely about a failed first attempt for the newly established People's Republic of China (PRC) sending a formal *Hajj* delegation to Mecca.

As the organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the *People's Daily* is widely regarded by the Western critics as a 'political instrument' for 'mass education' under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s firm grip.[3] Considering the significance of the *People's Daily*, it seems rather odd for today's observers that a story about a failed religious outreach to the Arab World could appear as its front-page news. Researchers have long noticed the PRC's political use of the *Hajj* mission as a form of 'people's diplomacy' to extend connections with the Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) nations (Shichor, 1979, pp. 41–45).[4] However, attentions are almost exclusively devoted to the successful ones organised after the PRC's diplomatic triumph at the Bandung Conference in 1955.

Nevertheless, the story presents the cooperation between ethnic-religious groups and the Communist central government. Failed or not, this trip marked one of the very first diplomatic ice-breaking attempts of the PRC to establish formal relations with the Arab nations. It also demonstrated an intricate cooperative relation between religion and state in the early PRC period. The 1952 *Hajj* mission was organised by the newly formed Chinese Islamic Association Preparation Committee (中国伊斯教协会筹 委 会, CIAPC, later became the Islamic Association of China, 中国伊斯 教协会, IAC in 1953) headed by Burhan Shahidi (包尔汉), a Chinese Uygur revolutionary leader and then the chairman of the PRC's Xinjiang Provincial People's Government. One of the vice directors of the committee was Da Pusheng (达浦生), a Muslim scholar and Hui Chinese born in Jiangsu, a coastal province at the estuary of Yangtze River.

2 'Woguo Yisilanjiao Chaojintuan yi Fanjing zai Bajisitan Shoudao Dangdirenmin Relie Huanying (The Islamic Haji delegation of our country returned to Beijing They received a warm welcome by the local people,' *People's Daily*, 24 October 1952, page 1.

3 Regarding the Western perspective on the *People's Daily*, see one of the earliest systematic narratives on this topic in the English-speaking world (Houn, 1958-1959).

4 Some researchers even go a step further and called the Hajj delegations organised by the PRC as the 'Hajj diplomacy'. (See Al-Tamimi, 2013, pp. 60–62).

The delegation was dispatched only a month after the initiation meeting of the CIAPC. Led by Imam Da Pusheng and Imam Imin Mesum (伊明· 合 木), an ethnic Uyghur and veteran of Uyghur independent movement, the group consisted of 16 members. All delegates were highly influential Imams (阿訇, Akhoond), Islamic scholars and Muslim community leaders from *Hui* and *Uygur* ethnic groups. Some members on this team of 16 people were Chinese Azharites such as Pang Shiqian (Muhammad Tawadu Pang, 士 , 1902-1958) and Zhang Bingduo (Sulaiman Zhang, 秉 , 1915-2004), and many had already been to Mecca during the Republican period.[5] However, as citizens of the PRC, which at the time had no diplomatic relation with Saudi Arabia, the delegates had to rely on Pakistan's facilitation to apply for visas to Mecca. After waiting in Pakistan for over a month, none of their visa applications was successful. However, during their stay in Karachi, apart from meeting political and religious elites in Pakistan, the delegates also attended receptions hosted by *Chargé d'affaires* of Saudi Arabia and Ambassador of Egypt. Their primary focus was to showcase the 'significant improvement in the living condition of different ethnic groups in the PRC' and introduce 'the PRC's policy on ethnic equality and religious freedom'.[6]

1952 was a volatile year for the PRC. Apart from the intensification of the Korean War, the internal riots of ethnic groups also posed as threats to the new state. On April 2nd and 4th, two uprisings led by Ma Zhenwu's (马震武) Jahriyya order took place in Guyuan (固原), Ningxia and Zhangjiachuan (张家川), Gansu respectively (Gladney, 1996, p. 136; Stewart, 2018, pp. 31–32). The incidents happened in less than two months after the PRC's central government announced the implementation of the regional ethnic autonomy system. The spiritual authority of the religious leader in ethnic minority groups could still be competitors to the state, similar to the situations in late imperial and Republican China. Traditionally, the 'protests and clashes' between the state and different ethnic and religious groups receive most of the scholarly attention. Under the dominating discourse of identity politics, such a perspective assumes the primordial quantities of ethnic and religious identities, projecting a naturally confrontational interethnic relation in the PRC (for examples, see: Rong, Gönül, and Xiaoyan [2016], Rudelson, [1997]; Gladney, [1991]; Israeli, [1980]). The state, in this context, as a hegemonic presence, functions as a 'manager' and extends its top-down tight 'control' over different domestic social groups to

5 For historical account of the Chinese Muslim students studying in al-Azhar, see Mao (2016). John T. Chen gives an excellent discussion about this transnational exchange of Chinese Hui students studying in al-Azhar prior-1949 in relation to the formation of their political and historical subjectivity. Chen's study primarily focuses on Pang Shiqian (see J. T. Chen, 2014; also see, Y. Chen, 2016). Regarding the Hajj trips in the Republic period, see Y. Chen, 2016, pp. 75-78). For personal memoirs and collection of historical documents regarding the dispatch of Hui students in the 1930s, see Bozhong and Na (2011). For the historical account of the intellectual exchanges between China and the Egypt before 1949, see Benite (2014).

6 Woguo Yisilan Chaojintuan yi Fanjing' (Our Hajj Delegation returned to Beijing), *People's Daily*, October 24, 1952, 1st page

maintain the *status quo* (Leung, 2005). Religious groups under such a political structure are believed to be suffering the most in the atheistic Communist party-state (Dillon, 1994; Doyon & Thornely, 2014).

Apart from the apparent Cold War stigma assuming the common behave of a 'communist regime', such a reading of the situation fails to recognise the complexity of the PRC's ethnic relations in the Chinese socio-political context. However, it is always dangerous to assume the universality of what the term 'religion' signifies and its relation with the 'state'. It is insufficient to presume that the same socio-political pattern could encompass all the stories about the end of empire and the rise of the nation-state across the globe. In the case of China, while the Chinese Empire as a political institution of governance broke down, its territorial extent remains more or less intact. The new republic also inherited the ethnic diversity from the old empire. This reality calls for a sincere query of the modern Chinese history and reviews the terminologies in our theoretical arsenal to see if there are any ahistorical Western-centric presumptions of universality.

Throughout the history of Chinese state-making and nation-building, there are also countless cases which the spiritual authority of religious groups was offered or gained by forming a partnership with the central political power. In the Chinese context, Islam is the only religion associated with ethnic groups and regarded as an integral element in Chinese cultural heritage. Two major ethnic groups are Hui and Uygur. Many recent studies have revealed the Chinese Muslims' active participation in the national salvation movements against the Japanese invasion (J. T. Chen, 2014; Mao, 2011).

The characteristic of Islam being a world religion also played a crucial part in determining the way which Chinese Muslims were involved and treated in the modern Chinese nation-building process. In the early years of the PRC, Chinese Muslim groups were the conduit to champion the state's diplomatic outreach to the Arab/Islamic nations in searching for an international United Front against imperialism. The role of Chinese Muslim groups, particularly the IAC in extending and facilitating diplomatic links with Arab countries received extensive scholarly attention (for example, see Brazinsky, 2017; Gladney, 1994; Wang, 1993). Nevertheless, the common practice in the existing historical investigations is to look at 1949 as a watershed moment which abruptly separates the object of study into two. Such a story-telling is only complete if we believe that the top-down regime change creates two isolated universes, each with its unique habitat with no prior history behaving distinctively from each other. Otherwise, we must break away from the conviction that the regime change severs the lineage of human history. Instead, we could look at the cooperation between ethnic-religious groups and the Communist central government in the modern history of Chinese nation-building and searching for national salvation. This remained the

case until 1958 when the anti-right movement began to severely influence the ethnic and religious affairs (He, 2004, pp. 110–111).[7]

This paper addresses the construction of affinities, an aspect in the complex dynamic between the central authority and minority groups in the society which only recently begins to receive some scholarly attention from historians on empires such as David Cannadine (Cannadine, 2002). It also echoes Robert Bellah's application of the Rousseauian concept 'civil religion' when discussing the cohesive force in the US that drives its cultural and social integration among different groups (Bellah, 1980, p. 17). This paper focuses on Muslim intellectuals and prominent religious figures who are ethnically Huizu (**回族**, Hui ethnic group). It examines the representation of and presentation by these Hui individuals in the public domain with a specific interest in understanding the way that Islamic religious discourse was entangled in consensus building in the early PRC period before 1958. It hopes to elaborate on how the ethnic identity of Hui and the religious identity of Muslim reconcile and even resonate with the Chinese national identity of *'Zhonghua Minzu'* (**中 民族**, literally Chinese nation). This paper particularly interests in understanding the role of the discourse and politics of anti-imperialist and anti-colonial internationalism and human liberation in facilitating the making of the common political subjectivity known as '*Zhongguo Renmin*' (**中国人民**, literally means Chinese people).

Hui as a 'National Question'

National Question is universal in nature. It unfolds across the world but takes different shapes in various socio-political contexts. On the practical level, the CCP began to systematically examine the issue of the relation between 'Huizu' and 'Huijiao' (**回教**, Islam) in the late 1930s, soon after the formation of an Anti-Japanese United Front in 1937. In his Report to the 6th Plenary Session of the 6th Politburo of the CPC in October 1938, Mao Zedong elaborated the importance of this unity in ensuring the success of the anti-Japanese War and establishing the republic. He stated that the anti-Japanese struggles marked a 'great unity and progress across the country'. The 'only way' to 'triumph in this protracted war' is to 'unite all ethnic groups, strive for progress and rely on the masses'. He particularly emphasised that such a unity 'is not across all the political parties and social classes, but also across all the ethnic groups in China'. This is to 'counter the enemy's plot to dissociate all the ethnic minorities from our nation'. Hence, one of the most urgent missions 'at this point is to unite all the ethnic groups into one'. In order to achieve this purpose, 'all the ethnic groups such as Mongol, Hui, Tibet, Miao, Yao, Yi, and Fan should have equal rights as Han'. Under the principle of unity against Japanese invasion, all the ethnic

7 In 1958, Li Weihan (李维汉, 1896-1984), the then Minister of the United Front Work Department gave a talk about Islam and the social development of Hui people. He particularly pointed out the religious obligations such as Zakat and Ramadan held back the social development of Hui communities (see Li, 1987).

groups 'should have the right to self-governance', while at the same time, 'unite with the Han people to establish a unified nation'. Under this principle, we should 'rectify the mistake of Han Chauvinism, respect the cultures, religions, and customs of ethnic minority groups'. The Han people should also avoid 'using insulting languages and committing abusive actions against them'. Only through the 'self- propelled strive for rights by the ethnic minority groups' and the 'implementation from the government' can we achieve the' true improvements of ethnic relations in China' (Mao, 1983).

Mao's elaboration on the ethnic issue concerning the nation-building process sets out the guideline and principles for the ethnic autonomy in both the CCP-controlled base areas (根据地) and later the PRC. Under this guideline, the Association of Research on National Question in the North West Bureau of the Central Committee of the CCP edited a comprehensive narrative based on the investigation of the Hui minority in the CCP-controlled area. This edited volume was officially published in 1941 in Yan'an. It strongly criticises the Japanese narrative which promotes the 'self-determination of Hui' to establish a Hui nation-state through secession (Minzuwentiyanjiuhui, 1980, pp. 83-95). To simplify the 'Hui's problem' (*Huihui Wenti*, 回回问题) as a religious issue is a 'representation of Han Chauvinist attitude'. Another 'fallacy' it challenges is the 'pan-Islamic attempt' to 'fabricate a so-called Islamic ethnicity', which stated by the editors is associated with the imperialist colonial expansion (Minzuwentiyanjiuhui, 1980, pp. 105-06). It particularly criticises the 'Japanese imperialist advocacy' of the 'Islamic nationalist movement' in China as a way to single out the 'ethnic groups believed in Islam' and 'put them on the opposite side of the Chinese unity against Japanese invasion' (Minzuwentiyanjiuhui, 1980, p. 107).[8]

The recognition of Hui's problem as a 'national question' raises a main theoretical and legal concern. How is the concept of 'self-determination' defined? More importantly, should the CCP recognise the right to secession as Lenin did? These concerns echo the classic debate between Vladimir Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg over the issue of 'national question' in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When facing the issue of 'self-determination', the CCP inevitably has to address the reality of ethnic diversity inherited from the fallen empire without breaking the unity apart. Apart from referring to the strategic utility of forming solidarity against the Japanese invasion, the CCP developed a theoretical understanding of national problem through the discourse of class liberation. The CCP recognised that the Hui people received oppressions from two sides, namely the international imperialism represented

8 For historical account of the Chinese Muslim students studying in al-Azhar, see Mao (2016). John T. Chen gives an excellent discussion about this transnational exchange of Chinese Hui students studying in al-Azhar prior-1949 in relation to the formation of their political and historical subjectivity. Chen's study primarily focuses on Pang Shiqian (see J. T. Chen, 2014; also see, Y. Chen, 2016). Regarding the Hajj trips in the Republic period, see Y. Chen, 2016, pp. 75-78). For personal memoirs and collection of historical documents regarding the dispatch of Hui students in the 1930s, see Bozhong and Na (2011). For the historical account of the intellectual exchanges between China and the Egypt before 1949, see Benite (2014).

through the Japanese invasion, and the domestic 'national oppression' (*Minzu Yapo*, 民族压迫) inflicted mainly by Han Chauvinism. Hence, instead of focusing on the self-determination aspect, the CCP's attitude towards 'national/ethnic question' emphasises on equality.

Theoretically, the CCP's take on 'national question' is closer to what Rosa Luxemburg's criticism against Lenin. Luxemburg's analysis is rooted in the socio-political context of Poland. The rise of Polish nationalism in the early 19th century, as Luxemburg argued, is fundamentally different from the nationalist recognition formed in the Central European nations. The root of Polish national aspirations, according to Luxemburg, is the 'natural-feudal economy' rather than 'modern capitalist development' that gave birth to nationalisms in Central European nations in the 19th century. Henceforth, Luxemburg rejects to assume that the nation-state unequivocally suggests national 'independence'. Instead, she recognises 'nation-state' as the 'class dominance of the bourgeoisie' with a strong tendency of adopting 'protectionist policy, indirect taxation, militarism' and consequently leading towards 'war, and conquest' (Luxemburg, 1976, pp. 175-182). In the case of Poland the true 'national movements' for liberation 'vanished' when the feudal economy died out due to the hegemonic expansion of colonialism. This process also 'transplanted' the class of bourgeoisie 'into the Polish soil'. For the genesis, the Polish bourgeoisie, who advocates for self-determination and establishment of a nation-state, is 'clearly an anti-national factor' (Luxemburg, 1976, p. 176). The '"national" movements' and 'struggles for "national interests" in all the 'modern societies' are 'usually class movements of the ruling strata of the bourgeoisie' (Luxemburg, 1976, p. 137).

Based on the Polish historical context, Luxemburg rejected the assumption that there is a universal 'formula' of 'the right of all nations to self-determination'. She particularly points out that such a formula will do more harm than good in 'smaller and petty nations'. Without positioning the smaller nations in the context that capitalism in the 19th century excised its hegemonic power globally, the pursuit of their 'independent existence' will just be 'an illusion'. She states that 'hopes of solving all nationality questions within the capitalist framework by ensuring all nations, races, and ethnic groups the possibility of "self-determination" is a complete utopia.' (Luxemburg, 1976, pp. 129-131). Luxemburg argues that the rights of nations should not be the standard for socialist parties when discussing the national problem. She considers concepts such as nation, right, and the will of the people are 'remnants from the times of immature and unconscious antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie'. In this sense, the 'national question' is fundamentally a 'question of class interests'. For the 'class-conscious and independently organized proletariat' to use these concepts would be a 'historical contradiction' (Luxemburg, 1976, pp. 137-138).

Lenin's defending of the right to self-determination, on the other hand, should also be read in the unique political context of Russian Empire. Similar to Luxemburg, Lenin is acutely aware of the socio-political context when discussing the national question (Lenin, 1964, pp. 410-414). Different from Poland, Russia was predominantly an imperialist power in the 19th century with the feudal landlords as the ruling class. The 'Great Russians in Russia are an oppressor nation'. The 'creation of an independent national state', in the early 20th century, 'remains the privilege of the Great-Russian nation alone'. Hence, by rejecting the 'right to secession' for small nations in Russia, argued by Lenin, Luxemburg is 'in fact assisting the Great-Russian Black Hundreds'. To Lenin, advocating the right to secession for the weak and small nations is to fight against the Great-Russian oppression to the other nations in the Russian Empire. It helps Russia to 'clear the road to its freedom', consequently forms a crucial component of the Russian revolution for liberation and equality (Lenin, 1964, pp. 409-413).

According to Lenin, the global expansion of capitalist *Produktionsverhältnisse* in the late 19th century also brought the oppressive relation between powerful and weak nations to the world. Most of the countries in the East were colonies or semi-colonies of the Great Powers. Hence, the 'awakening' of national movements for self-determination among these nations were undoubtedly challenging the unequal world order dominated by the strong nations (Lenin, 1964, p. 400). However, we should also notice that while accepting the 'right to secession', it is important to acknowledge the greater unity based on the proletarian class recognition. Lenin uses the case of Swedish socialists' support of Norwegian independence in 1905 and argues that the support for national secession forms 'fraternal class solidarity' among the working-class people. By recognising the 'right of the Norwegians to secede', the Swedish workers challenged the 'privileges of the Swedish bourgeoisie and aristocracy' and consequently demonstrated the 'progressive nature' of supporting weak nations' self-determination (Lenin, 1964, pp. 435-529). By the year 1916 during World War I, Lenin developed the thesis further and elaborated the intricate entanglement between national self-determination and internationalism. He states that those who 'repudiated' the national problem 'in the name of the social revolution' are the Proudhonists. The true Marxists have 'mainly the interests of the proletarian class struggle in the advanced countries' in mind (Lenin, 1964, pp. 150-151). In this sense, the Great Russians could only achieve liberation by supporting the self-determination of the oppressed nations out of the spirit of internationalism.

In China's case, the national question bears a two-fold characteristic. On the one hand, the Chinese Empire, similar to the old empires in the East, were put under pressure of global colonial expansion in the 19th century. On the other hand, its ethnic diversity brought forward an internal power dynamic with the ruling class

and ethnic groups, mainly the Han nation, as the oppressor of the ethnic minorities. The Chinese communist revolution, therefore, has to combat imperialism and Han Chauvinism to achieve the liberation of the Chinese people (Mao, 1983, pp. 242-243). To the CCP, the broadly accepted theoretical norm is Marx's take on religion as an ideological reflection of a fundamental socio-economic oppression. Similarly, the identification of ethnic differences was not driven by the physical anthropological interest in understanding the biological characteristics scientifically but to address the political problem of a global inequality manifested as 'national questions' due to the highly diverse levels of socio-economic development and modes of production among regions.

With the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the institutional arrangement of PRC's central government reflects CCP's take on religious and ethnic issues as components in the national mission of socialist transformation. This take was based on two moral ideals, namely the pursuit of equality and the promise of human liberation. Since the liberation is the ultimate salvation yet to come, the pursuit of equality becomes the moral guideline in daily political practices. In this sense, the ethnic affair was prioritised by having a cabinet-level institute underneath the State Council known as the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China (中 人民共和国国家民族事务委员会).[9] The religious affair was regulated under the authority of State Administration for Religious Affairs, a sub-ministerial level under the State Council. Under the party organisational structure, ethnic and religious affairs are still part of the United Front works (*tongzhan gongzuo,* 统战工作) and oversaw by the second bureau of the United Front Work Department under the command of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

Apart from the apparent Soviet influence, the PRC's take on religious affairs in association with ethnic issues reflects a unique socio-political condition in China. To the CCP, a modern Chinese revolution entails a two-stage transformation. It firstly is a political revolution that overthrows the *Ancien Régime*. The success of the political revolution marks the beginning of persistent pursuit of a social revolution, which ultimately will not only transform the nation according to the socialist vision of

9 Before the 1954 reform, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission was under the direct management of the Government Administration Council of the Central People's Government (中央人民政府政务院). The 1954 Constitution reformed the governmental structure and introduced the State Council of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国国务院), a much bigger administrative authority chaired by the premier. The State Ethnic Affairs Commission was temporary suspended between 1970 and 1978. Since 1978, it had been a department in the State Council. The 2018 central government institutional reform put the State Ethnic Affairs Commission under the leadership of the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (中共中央统一战线工作部), a party organisation under the Central Committee of the CPC (中国共产党中央委员会). The State Ethnic Affairs Department continues to be part of the State Council. But the 2018 reform reintroduces a stronger presence of the party's leadership in ethnic affairs and reinforces the importance of ethnic affairs as a United Front work. Similar reform also applies to the leadership of religious work. It was put back under the United Front Work Department (see Zhonggongzhongyang, 2018).

modernisation but more importantly ensure the rise of the political consciousness of the Chinese people. The national revolutionary agenda is also firmly fused with a Marxist internationalist vision of human liberation, which, in the PRC's discourse, could be achieved through the third world national independence movement, or generally speaking, the global resistance against imperialism.

The Chinese Understanding of the National Question

The fall of the Qing Empire also presented a thorny problem to the inheritors of its sovereign. Both the Republic of China and the PRC had to face the challenge of nation-building among the ethnically diverse peoples inhabited in the vast territorial span. How to bring the dispersed peoples, who had long experienced ignorance, distrusts and even aversion to each other closer and form a coherent national identity? How to avoid going down the same route of devolution or disintegration as most of the empires in the 20th century? These problems are more practical than theoretical comparing to the discussions on the 'national question' within the international Communist movement.

To the CCP, the identity building revolves around the making of the '*Zhongguo Renmin*'. *Renmin* (人民, people) connotates a collective subjectivity formed by liberated and aware individuals. It transcends the class and national boundaries. The attributive word *Zhongguo* (中国, Chinese) gives the universal concept a national and historical footing. *Zhongguo Renmin* hence becomes the national identity, which inclusivity derives from the transcendence of the political ideal of *Renmin*. During the wartime, the Japanese imperialist was the common enemy to the Han, Hui, Manchurian, and Mongolian people in China. This shared experience accelerated the formation of a trans-regional, cross-racial, and class-inclusive political recognition of a collective identity known as the *Zhongguo Renmin* (Mitter, 2004; Perry, 1995; Yin & Zhang, 2011).

Mao once gave an intriguing analogy which brought forward the essence of *Remin* as a transcendental concept. In his concluding remark for the Seventh National Congress of the CCP in 1945, Mao stated that '[o]ur God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people.' (Mao, 1965, pp. 321-324). This speech was later given the title of 'The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains' (愚公移山) and made as one of the must-read writings available to the Chinese general public. We can see Mao using the similar analogy after 1949. During his meeting with Iraqi Culture and Workers Delegations in 1960, he praised the Iraqi Revolution in 1958 and condemned the US imperialism. 'God will not forgive them', Mao said. He further explained 'People are God' and history 'belongs to people' (Pang et al. 2013, p. 391).

Mao was also ready to apply the same principle to understand the role of religion in the context of a communist revolution. Mao once gave a practical read toward

the need of working with religious groups in forming the unity of the people. When meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in 1959, Mao was asked about whether or not a Communist member should go to church. Mao suggested that 'as long as the masses are still going (to churches), a Communist member could also go'. Mao said that Khalid Bakdash, the founder of the Syrian Communist Party, expressed the same concern about Communist members going to mosques when he visited China. Mao's opinion was rather practical. Communists going to churches and mosques 'were to get closer to and unite with the masses'. Although being atheists themselves, Communists should not deny the reality that 'the masses still believe in God' (Pang et al. 2013, pp. 188-189). Hence, to 'get close to the mass and unite with the mass', Communist members could even go to mosques and churches.[10] To Mao, China and the Arab world were linked by the same purposes of anti-imperialism and national construction. This unity hence made China 'friend' and 'brother' of the Arab world. The Arab world, Mao stated, was also 'our friend and brother'.[11]

Mao's comments on religious issues presented a two-fold approach of the CCP in the making of *Zhongguo Renmin*. The political subjectivity of *Renmin* will form spontaneously with the presence of imperialism as a common enemy. It will also require the active social engagement from the Communist members, who, in Lenin's sense, are the vanguard of the masses. In China's case, the end of the anti-Japanese War in 1945 and the establishment of the PRC in 1949 marked the termination of an immediate common enemy who could threaten the survival of the nation. However, to the general public in the PRC, the termination of the Japanese invasion was only just a temporary and very much regional success in the global resistance against imperialism. The outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 reinforced such a conviction among the Chinese people.

Apart from the imperialist aggression in East Asia, Chinese media also kept a close eye on the situation in the MENA region where the people's call for national independence was high. It was through the support of the Arab people's struggles

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11 This was mentioned in Mao's meeting with the then president of Yemen Arab Republic Abdullah al-Sallal in 1964 (Pang et al. 2013, p. 360)

against imperialism that the transnationality of the anti-imperialist struggle became more transparent to the Chinese people. China was portrayed as the home front of this global struggle for liberation, which manifested in the other parts of the Afro-Asian world as direct military confrontations.

The support of the global military struggles against imperialism was more than supplying goods and materials to the front lines. The then Chinese people were also immersed in the sentiment that supporting the brothers and sisters who were still entangled in the anti-imperialist struggles was morally just. The sense of fulfilment came with building a 'new China' (新中国, *xinzhongguo*) through revolution was carried further by a more universal conviction that the oppressed people have the possibility and capability of overthrowing the old hegemonic world order and build a better one across the world. Hence, not only participating the Korean War could be received as an initiative to 'defend home and nation', but also supporting national independence movements in areas much further away from China could be taken as a 'national responsibility' of the new republic.

While supporting the anti-imperialist military struggles in the Middle East provided the 'new element of sociality' on a global scale after the World War II, allowing the ethnic groups to participate in the grand struggle against imperialism as parts of the large collective, the domestic development on ethnic policy (*minzu zhengce*, 民族政策) helped to consolidate the CCP's promise of building a better and more equal society. Articles 50 to 53 in the *Common Program of The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference* (later refers as the *Common Program*), a provisional constitution of the PRC adopted in 1949, laid the fundamental principle of Chinese ethnic policy. The PRC is regarded as 'a big fraternal and co-operative family composed of all its nationalities', which are 'equal' to each other. The formation of such a fraternal family falls on the shoulders of 'all nationalities within the boundaries of the PRC'. They should 'oppose imperialism' and 'establish unity and mutual aid among themselves' ("Zhongguorenmin Zhengzhixieshang," 1953, p. 1.). Apart from stating the legal and political equal rights, the Common Program also criticises the Han chauvinism and states the 'freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs.' ("Zhongguorenmin Zhengzhixieshang," 1953).

In this context, Islam received more attention as a transnational cultural identity in the discussion of 'national question' in the PRC. It was then treated as a cultural heritage that enhanced the common connection between Chinese people and the Muslim population in the Afro-Asian nations. Deng Yingchao, the vice-president of the All-China Women's Federation and wife of Premier Zhou Enlai, presented an image of pan-Asian solidarity across all Asian nationalities (*minzu*, 民族) in her report

to the All-Asian Women's Conference in Beijing in 1949. Islamic culture, 'centred in the Middle East', together with other 'highly developed and sophisticated cultures across Asian nations' were 'momentous contributions to world civilisation'. Deng acknowledged that in the modern period[12] the development of Asian 'ethnic people' (*gezu renmin*, 各族人民) were lagging behind. This, however, according to Deng, was due to the 'brutal oppression, excessive exploitation, and obscurantist policy implemented by foreign imperialists and national reactionaries'. [13] This Congress had official representatives from 15 nations, among which were Lebanon, Syria, and Iran. Israel also participated in this Congress. Narrating the cultural subjectivity of Asia challenged the colonial discourse on the Asiatic backwardness. The 'struggle' (*douzheng*, 斗争) against imperialism constituted the foundation of the political subjectivity of the Asian people (Xinhuashe, 1949, p. 1).

Deng's speech presents a Communist political take on Islam on an international stage. Islam is seen as a cultural heritage formed with material development. Hence, the repression of an individual culture is, in fact, suppressing or exploiting the physical advancement of a group of people who share a similar cultural heritage. This statement is responding to the 19th century Western theory of civilisation, which is associated with the idea of ethnonationalism and used to justify the colonial expansion in the non-Western world as the *mission civilisatrice*. To the early CCP members, the national independence movements from the non-Western world were the main components in the global resistance against imperialism and colonialism. Such movements were not only a political one but more importantly a cultural one. In the Chinese revolutionary context, independence can only be achieved through people's emancipation[14] in three aspects, namely political, economic, and cultural.[15] The same principle was used to understand the Third World national independence movements. Since national independence is merely a gateway leading towards the ultimate human liberation, it is important to articulate the political mission of national independence in the context of the internationalist ideal of equality. The CCP uses the term 'new patriotism' to enunciate the departure from the 'old' self-centred nationalism rooted in the European historical context. In the 1950s' context, such a new patriotism contained devotion to both the socialist construction on a domestic level and safeguarding peace through anti-imperialism on an international level.

12 Mao stated this opinion when he met with the General Secretary of the Syrian Communist Party Khalid Bakdash in 1959. He expressed the same idea to Nikita Khrushchev later (Pang et al. 2013, pp. 188-189).

13 This was mentioned in Mao's meeting with the then president of Yemen Arab Republic Abdullah al-Sallal in 1964 (Pang et al. 2013, p. 360).

14 In Chinese official historiography, modern (*jindai*) refers to the period between 1840 when the First opium war broke out and 1949 when the PRC established.

15 'Yazhou Funv wei Minzu Duli Renmin Minzhu yu Shijieheping er Douzheng' (Asiatic Female fighting for national independence, people's democracy and world peace), *People's Daily*, December 12, 1949, page 1. Also, 'Yazhou Fudaihui Ding Jinri Kaimu' (The Asiatic Female Congress will open today), *People's Daily*, Dec. 10, 1949, page 1.

With the newly established republic, some Chinese Muslim scholars began to articulate an extra layer of devotion. Wen Xingsan (闻省三), a prominent Muslim scholar and pro-national activist during the anti-Japanese period, proposed 'four missions' for the Muslim in the PRC. He states that the self-cultivation of a good Muslim draws inspirations from two main sources. 'The Qu'ran teaches us the importance of Tawḥīd'. From the 'viewpoint of the people', Chinese Muslim should also 'love the motherland, be determined, constantly raise our political awareness, learn the policies and laws of our nation, obey the law, and strengthen the devotion to the nation and the people to increase the power of national-construction.' (Wen, 1957, p. 13). Wen's discussion responds to the PRC's general principle on the religious issue, which requires the religious groups to 'love the country and religious organisations' (爱国爱教) at the same time. Muslim scholars in the early PRC period were eager to communicate their devotion to the nation-building agenda by actively participating in major state organised events. They also actively published commentaries and essays in the Chinese-speaking national media, backing the state positions on various issues with religious teachings. In the 1950s, one of the most important topics which attracted the Chinese Muslim scholars' attention was the call for anti-imperialism.

The discourse of a global struggle against imperialism enabled the CCP to encompass the transnationality of Islam and address to the Arab world directly through such a bond. Chinese Muslim scholars played a key role in the process. In 1950, soon after the outbreak of Korean War, Ma Jian, a prominent Chinese Islamic scholar trained at Al-Azhar University and vital member in the CIAPC, published a short article in the People's Daily stating that the imperialists, particularly the US imperialist were the 'arch nemesis of Islam'. Ma Jian described Islam as a religion of resistance by quoting from the *Qu'ran* verses 2:256, 18:29, 39:14 and 15. He harshly criticised the missionary work of Samuel Marinus Zwemer among the Chinese and south-east Asian Muslims as an instrument of American imperialism. Hence, competing for religious freedom among the Hui and other Muslim minorities in China became a part of the transnational struggle against imperialism. The article ends with a call for the arm to all the Muslim 'brothers and sisters' across different ethnic groups to 'contribute your powers' to resist against 'American invasion', defend 'your religion' and 'your motherland', and to 'safeguard global peace' (Ma, 1950, p. 3).

With the establishments of the CIAPC in 1952 and the IAC in 1953, the Chinese Muslims quickly became the champion in advocating the 'new patriotism' on both national and international levels. Chinese Muslims, as the letter sent to Mao Zedong on the launching day of the CIAPC, suggests, enjoy the rights of 'ethnic equally and religious freedom' in the 'big fraternal family'. The IAC that 'we are preparing for' will 'assist the people's government to implement the religious policy coined

in the Common Program'. Together with 'other fraternal ethnic groups in China', the Chinese Muslims 'turned from slaves to masters' of the country. To cherish this hard-earning happiness, the Chinese Muslims will 'strive for 'ethnic solidarity', the 'defence of motherland' and 'world peace' ("Zhongguo Yisilanjiao," 1952, p. 1).

CIAPC was quick in fulfilling its mandate. In 1952, in preparation for the Peace Conference of the Asian and Pacific Regions, the CIAPC made its proper appearance to the Chinese general public. The conference was scheduled to be held in Beijing from October 2 to 12, 1952, with the purpose to support the post-war 'economic and cultural reconstruction' in the world through the broad discussion on 'safeguarding the perpetual peace of the world'. According to Ma Jian, the mandate of this Peace Conference was in line with the mission of 'national independence in the Islamic countries as well as the rest of the world' (Ma, 1952). At the same time, the PRC was involved in the Korean War. As a case of direct military intervention, the Korean War was associated with struggles for national independence in the Islamic world. Speeches from Iranian and Iraqi delegates pointed out that 'the glorious and brave struggles for peace and independence by the Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Malaysian people' was not only a 'power that inspires us' but also 'our role model'. 'Strategic arteries' such as 'Suez Canal' and 'Çanakkale Boğazı' were 'more important than Korea' to the imperialists (Rahimian, 1952, pp. 88-90).

The CIAPC was essential in showcasing the religious freedom and ethnic equality in the PRC to the outside world. Its presence in major international events was usually received very positively. In the case of the Asian Peace Conference, 'seventeen delegates from India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, Syria, and other Mohammedan countries met the Chinese Islamic Society to praise religious liberty in China and the fitness of Mohammedanism in a Communist order of things'.[16] Since then, the presence of Chinese Muslims on the international stage became a common practice helping to demonstrate the PRC's non-hegemonic image to the broader third world nations. A famous example of using domestic political practices to communicate a devotion to international equality was Zhou Enlai's speech in the Bandung Conference in 1955. When facing the accusation by former Iraqi Prime Minister Muhammad Fadhel al-Jamali that Communism was a 'new form of colonialism', Zhou responded with the example of the PRC's ethnic policy on the treatment of Chinese Muslim. He suggested that with the principle of ethnic autonomy and religious freedom, the PRC was aware of the danger of imposing Han hegemony on the ethnic minorities in China. The PRC as a unified nation as a whole was never going to adopt hegemonic attitude when interacting with other nations in the World (Barnett, 1955; Enlai, 1990; Ma, 1952).

16 The CCP uses a colloquial term '*fanshen*' when communicating this idea to the general public. Fanshen literally means rollover the body.

China as the Home Front of the Arab People's Struggle against Imperialism

With hot wars for national independence in the MENA region, the PRC was self-portrayed as the home front of this long global resistance against injustice. In this sense, this belief was able to bring the idea of being part of a noble collective struggle for a better future for humankind much closer to the Chinese people living in peacetime, particularly after the end of the Korean War. Nation-building, in this context, was almost like a war-time social mobilisation that brought together people from different ethnic groups, social classes and religious backgrounds. The *People's Daily* began to cover the events in Palestine as early as 1946, almost immediately after the military confrontations and tensions against the Western nations after the WWII in Algeria, Egypt, and Palestine.[17] After 1949, the continuous armed struggle of the 'Arab people' against imperialism was communicated to the Chinese people through news reports, political movements, literary works, folk music, cartoons, and posters. The connection with the 'Arab brothers' was also reflected in people's daily life through mainly agricultural produce which came through international barter trade with the Arab nations.[18] Such a transnational temporality formed an experience of working towards the political ideal of 'liberation of mankind'. Additionally, it also provided the Chinese people with a political purpose which went beyond the limited concern of national interests during the process of socialist construction.

The support to the Arab people enabled the Chinese Muslims to further incorporate their religious conviction in line with the state's political discourse of anti-imperialism in peacetime. It also allows the rest of the Chinese, mainly the Han ethnic majority, to get acquainted with the domestic Muslim population. Through the reader's letter in *People's Daily*, people were asking for 'more introductions of Arab Islamic art, literature, history, and other general knowledge'.[19] The *People's Daily* quickly reacted by publishing translations of Arab poems, short stories, travel logs, informative pieces on Arab affairs, and sometimes even excerpts from the *Qu'ran* on its 8th page. Books of translated Arabic literature were published and made available to the general public. Chinese Muslim scholar also began to write essays on *People's Daily*, introducing Arab people's long history of resistance against oppression by using the *Qu'ran* as a crucial referencing point. In this internationalist moment, Islam was integrated into the Chinese political discourse of human liberation through anti-

17 It is under this principle that the CCP rationalised their objection against the Tibet secession movement. In the case of Tibet, the CCP's argument is very similar to Rosa Luxemburg's concern about Polish national independent movement's incapability of achieving true freedom when the global imperial influences remained powerful in Poland. In 1951, the CCP stated that the Tibet independence would destroy the hard-earned national independence and freedom, render the Tibetan people as slaves of imperialists (see "Yonghu Guanyu Heping," 1981, p. 34.

18 'Importance of the Asian and Pacific Peace Conference' CIA Information Report, CIA-RDP82-00457R015400020005-8.

19 "Duzhe Laixin (Letters from readers)," *People's Daily*, July 19 1958, page 8.

imperialism and became a revolutionary narrative. Ma Jian argues that people in modern time 'enjoyed a much richer historical experience than the ancients'. Hence, we need to 'provide new interpretations of the *Qu'ran*'. In his opinion, 'do not quarrel with one another, or you may lose heart and your spirit may desert you' is the *Qu'ran*'s teaching expressing the same idea of 'power comes from unity', which derives from a CCP's slogan originated from the anti-Japanese War mobilisation. He argues that the historical development of the Arab world requires solidarity (Ummah). The Baghdad Pact nations broke the bond by serving as tools for imperialist invasion in the Middle and Near East. Hence, these countries betrayed the *Qu'ran*'s teaching of 'help one another to do what is right and good; do not help one another towards sin and hostility (5:2)'. Condemning the Baghdad Pact as both immoral and unlawful in the context of Shari'ah, Ma Jian argues that the anti-imperialist war against these aggressors waged by the oppressed people is a *jihad*. Such a righteous war connects the '370 million Muslim across the world' with 'millions of peace-loving people globally'. Chinese Muslim, as part of the Chinese people, forms the solid foundation for the unity and 'provide the Arab brothers with moral and material supports to extinguish the war flame of invasion and safeguard world peace'.[20] Reportedly, similar discussions occurred across the nation in many Muslim communities. Messages like 'the warmth of the Arab people towards Chinese people' were also communicated to the general public by Chinese Muslim who returned from *Hajj* through *People's Daily*, forming a sense of international solidarity against imperialism among the oppressed people.

From 1955 to 1958, the Sino-Egyptian interactions were almost the only tangible international relation that substantiated the rhetoric of the fraternal bond between Chinese and Arab peoples on Chinese national media. The disputes during the Bandung Conference reminded the CCP that the majority of the MENA nations perceived 'colonialism' quite differently. The grudge against the old colonisers such as France and Britain, as well as the fear towards the expansion of the Soviet-style communism, was more realistic to the MENA nations. Whereas the PRC's main concern was the threat from the growing global influence of the US, especially its presence in China's surrounding regions such as Taiwan Strait, the Korean peninsula, and Japan. Moreover, the 1956 Suez Canal even helped the US to gain a rather positive image among the MENA nations as the criticiser against the British and French colonisers (Westad, 2005, pp. 124-125).

The outbreak of the Iraqi revolution in 1958 presented China with an unmissable opportunity. First, unlike the Suez Crisis happened two years ago, the US responded in 1958 by sending a military force to Lebanon, fearing the nationalist movement in Iraq might threaten the US influence in the region. This sparked waves of anti-American protests in Egypt and some other MENA nations, which described by President

20 Ma Jian, 'Chongdu Gulanjing (Reinterpret *Qu'ran*),' *People's Daily*, Aug. 3 1958, page 8.

Dwight Eisenhower as a 'campaign of hatred' (Soliman, 2016, p. 137). Second, with the Arab world voicing their criticisms against the Western intervention, the call for safeguarding peace could potentially gain wider international public support. The seemingly arbitrary bridge between China and the Arab world based on the link of a shared cultural-religious background which only the Chinese Muslim could claim in reality began to gain its political substance through a *de facto* common-struggle against imperialist aggression.

On July 14, 1958, at around 4 am local time, the Free Officers led by brigadier General Abdel Karim Qasim began the march on Baghdad. At 5 am, people heard the voice of Colonel Abd al-Salam Arif on the radio informing the public that the Royal House had been overthrown and that the Old Regime (Khadduri, 1969). The US and the UK responded to the event by sending troops to Lebanon and Jordan respectively.[21] The PRC quickly reacted. From July 15 to 20, Mao and high-ranking officials were having overnight discussions about situations in Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. In a meeting on July 20 attended by 44 members of Politburos and military generals, a consensus was reached that the Chinese military must be prepared to respond to the current international situation (Pang et al., 2013, pp. 387-388).

In the meantime, the general public was mobilised voicing the people's support to the Arab brothers and excoriation to the Anglo-US aggressors. On July 17th, 1958, people from across Beijing gathered in Tiananmen Square. At 4 pm Beijing time, Liu Ren, the then chairman of the Beijing municipal Party committee announced the opening of the 'Conference on Protesting against the US Armed Invasion of Lebanon, Supporting the Republic of Iraq, and Lebanese National Independence Movement'. According to *People's Daily* on July 18th, there were 500 thousand people participated in this conference.

During the rally, Peng Zhen gave a short speech in support of the Lebanese people's national independence movement and demanding the US imperialist army's retreat from Lebanon. Peng condemned the US military move was an act of intervention. There was an Arabic translator on the spot, providing simultaneous translation of Peng's speech to the UAR delegates attending the meeting. A group of foreign journalists were also attending the meeting, among whom was French director Claude Lanzmann. He was there as a correspondent for the famous left-wing weekly

21 The US primarily concerned about losing influence on the MENA region in general and credibility of the US for 'assistance in the event of need would be brought into question throughout the world'. The US was also worried about the spread of Nasserism in the region. Hence, an initially denied request from Lebanese President Camille Chamoun for military assistance in June 1958 was now accepted. Regarding the initial decision on President Chamoun's request, see Smith (1992, pp. 109-110).The military intervention to Lebanon was initially implemented as a first step. The US 'would have to be prepared to go into the whole area'. See Smith (1992, pp. 211-212). The British main drive to collaborate with the US on military intervention was to protect the sterling oil. On July 17, the Cabinet voted 'for' to send two battalions of paratroopers to Jordan. See Catterall (2011).

L'Express. On July 24, readers of *L'Express* read about the 'astonishing scene' in Beijing. Lanzmann told his readers that there were street shows played by workers and students, re-enacting the event happened in Lebanon. People on Tiananmen Square saw the Arab people in shackles, the Arab dictator with whips, and arrogant US soldiers wearing black sunglasses, an image which many Chinese people were familiar with because of the Korean War finished less than three years ago at that point. On July 29, Lanzmann's article was translated into Chinese and appeared in *People's Daily*.[22] The story of Chinese people supporting the Arab people on July 17 reoccurred in many formats and read by Chinese across the nation. It became the foundation of an internationalist moment of 'liberation of mankind' experienced by many ordinary Chinese people.

Peng emphasised in his speech that the Iraqi revolution was a 'joint achievement' of 'Iraqi people', the 'Arab people', and the 'people across the world who cherish peace'. It was considered a heavy strike on the 'colonial rule of imperialism in the Middle East' and would bring a 'new wave' of national independence movements in the Afro-Asian world. The US military intervention in Lebanon was considered as a continuous imperialist threat of regional peace after the Suez Canal Crisis in 1956 and the Syrian Crisis in 1957. Peng argued that the same oppression was inflicted on the Chinese people through the military presence of the US in Taiwan. Hence, linking the Chinese people's resistance against imperialism with the struggle in the Arab world was not merely a historical rhetoric but more importantly was a contemporary matter of urgency. The resistance against Anglo-US imperialism presence in both China and the MENA region formed a global 'struggle on the frontline of anti-imperialism and anti-invasion'.[23]

The national mobilisation against imperialism created a political occasion which enables incorporation of the religious identity into the national identity. The mobilisation of the Chinese ethnic minority, particularly the Muslim population, was another essential element in this internationalist moment of supporting the Arab people. Islam as a shared cultural background between the Arab people and Chinese Muslim was strongly emphasised. By accentuating this collective identity of Muslim, Chinese Muslim group became a channel bringing the suffering from a distant land much closer to home to the newly independent Chinese people. In turn, by standing solidly in support of the Arab cause against foreign intervention, the PRC gained a moral high ground integrating the Islamic view of just war with a Chinese mission of fighting against imperialism through socialist construction. The message was delivered at the July 18th rally on Tiananmen Square. In addition to Peng Zhen's speech, Imam Da Pusheng, the vice president of the IAC also gave a short

22 "Yige Waiguo Jizhe Yanli de Beijingrenmin Fanqinlue Shiwei (The Anti-invasion rally through the eyes of a foreign reporter)," *People's Daily*, July 29 1958, page 8.

23 "Zhongguo Quanli Zhichi Yi Li Liangguo Renmin de Zhengyi Douzheng (China fully supports the righteous struggles from the people of Iraq and Lebanon," *People's Daily*, July 18 1958, page 2.

sermon, stating the 'support from Chinese Muslim to their Arab brothers'. He said that 'Chinese Muslim stands together with the Chinese people to celebrate the great triumph of the Iraqis'. The US aggression was an 'act of imperialism and Devil'. It was an 'unscrupulous provocation to the Arab world and a threat to the peace in Asia and Africa'. The Imam emphasised that 'loving your nation is part of the Islamic belief'. He quoted the famous phrase from Qu'ran and argued that a patriotic war against the US invasion was a 'fight in God's cause (2:190)'.[24]

On July 21, 1958, at a meeting with the Soviet ambassador to China Pavel Fyodorovich Yudin, Mao Zedong mentioned that 'it was difficult for us to conduct safeguarding peace movements, as people will say they were agitated by the communists.' Hence, these movements had 'very little influence'. However, the 'American and British invasions of Lebanon and Jordan became our advertiser'. Mao stated that 'isn't clear now that who stands for peace and who promotes war?' To Mao, the change of affair in the MENA region suggested that 'now the revolutionary force stored around the world will unite together under the slogan of safeguarding peace'. Mao then drew a picture of a hopeful future that 'anti-imperialist and anti-feudal revolutions are fermenting across Asia, Africa, and Latin America.' (Pang et al., 2013, 618-619). Mao had been highly praising the Egyptian nationalist movement since 1956 when the Suez Crisis occurred. In the opening speech of the Eighth National Congress of the CCP, he stated that the nationalist movement in Egypt should be understood in the global trend of 'struggling for national independence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America' (Zedong, 1993-1999a, pp. 114-118). These 'national independence movements' were not 'socialist revolutions'. But they were considered as the essential international force which could 'support all the socialist nations'.[25]

To the Chinese people, the political experience of supporting the Arab people was an internationalist moment that brought the Chinese and the Arabs together. It was also like a wartime social mobilisation that drew the Chinese people closer. The support of Iraq and Lebanese people happened at a vital point in the PRC's history. In early 1958, the CCP government launched the Great Leap Forward, a radical political attempt to uplift the Chinese productivity through mass movement. The campaign was focusing on helping China to achieve economic independence. It was also a project aiming to assist the Chinese people to gain political awareness through socialist construction. During the month-long support of Iraq and Lebanese people, *People's Daily* published numerous correspondences from workers, farmers, intellectuals, and students, stating that they wanted to help the Iraqi and Lebanese people through producing more steel, grains, and having technological breakthroughs.

24 "Zhongguo Musilin Zhichi Alabo Dixiong (Chinese Muslim support Arab brothers)," *People's Daily*, July 18 1958, page 2.

25 Mao mentioned this opinion in his meeting with delegates from Union des Populations du Cameroun in 1959 (Zedong, 1993-1999b, pp. 7-8).

During the campaign for supporting the Arab brothers, the political idealism of forming a unity with the Arab world was often given a humanitarian touch. On July 18, 1958, the eighth page of *People's Daily*, which was usually devoted to literary works and the introduction of socio-political knowledge, published a poem by Yuan Ying together with a blurry picture of an allegedly Lebanese child.[26] The poem depicts that when the US soldiers landed in Lebanon, this child's 'eyes narrow and lips tighten.' The child is affirmative that 'we, the Arabs, will drive those US invaders out'. It is 'the world's people standing behind this little kid'. This image of an indignant Lebanese child quickly caught the heart of the Chinese people. In the following months, stage plays, poems, and folk songs were written about this child, transforming him into the embodiment of imperialist brutality and heroism of the Third World resistance.[27]

At the time, the narrative in the public domain was that by supporting the Arab brothers who were fighting on the anti-imperialism front line, China then became the home front in this long-lasting international warfare. People from all the regions, social classes, and ethnic groups were mobilised to support the righteous cause of the Arab people. The mobilisation under the spirit of internationalism was also associated with the General Line of Socialist Construction. Hence, workers and farmers were encouraged to participate in rallies and study groups about MENA affairs after working hours or during work breaks. Students' attendance at rallies should also be in after class time. More importantly, it is encouraged to speed up the production and construction to support people in the Middle East. Activities from across the nation were meticulously recorded, some of which were also published in *People's Daily.*

Readers in China encountered stories like Ma'an'shan Steel Factory workers 'proposed to hit the invasive wolf by producing more steel and iron', or workers from Quan'jiao County Machinery Factory posted Big-character posters after 'attending group meetings protesting against the crime of US and UK invasion of the Middle East' stating that they 'decided to work overnight in order to support the righteous struggle of the Arab people'. Miners and oil workers from Tongchuan in Shan'xi province stated that Chinese workers 'swore to be the backup for the Arab workers'. Farmers were also enthusiastically involved in the demonstration of solidarity. In Yinxiang village in Shan'xi province, farmers 'were working overnight ploughing over 100 mu of land after finishing the group meeting condemning the crimes of US imperialists'. About '3000 farmers from Xinmin county in Liaoning province' worked overnight to 'fight the drought' to 'strengthen motherland's ability to safeguard the world peace and support the

26 Yuan Ying. "Libanen yi Xiaohai (A small kid from Lebanon)," *People's Daily*, July 18, 1958, page 8.

27 For example, "Libanen Xiaohai (A Lebanese kid)," People's Daily, July 27, 1958, page 8.

righteous struggle of the Arab people'.[28] Similar reports from workers, farmers, shop clerks, and even business owners appeared on *People's Daily* nearly on a daily basis from July to mid-August in 1958.

Conclusion

In the Chinese political discourse, Islam is officially recognised as a world religion and a socioeconomic system. In the context of the socialist revolution, the socio-political role of Islam does not always have to be in a contest with the state. To the broader Third World nations, it is not strange to witness that religion, religious groups, and religious thinking actively participating in the modernisation mission of nation-building. This historical reality requires us to further question the Eurocentric reading of modernity bearing a key characteristic of 'secularisation', hence the process of separating 'state' and 'church'. Instead, we could investigate the role of religion, particularly the cohesion between religious and political forces in the universal mission of human liberation and socialist modernisation. The CCP, being a vanguard party, bears the idealistic mission of striving for human liberation. As the ultimate stage of people's self-awareness, human liberation could only be achieved through people's active involvement in gradual social transformations. In the case of the early PRC, anti-imperialism and socialist construction were the two primary political goals allowing people to be politically engaged and consequently creating a common ground for recognition. Hence, religion was considered as merely another form of ideology which needs to be incorporated into the political mission leading toward human liberation.

The CCP also recognises religion as a socioeconomic institution. During the process of socialist construction, the implementation of land reform policy in different regions was regularly challenging the interests of the local religious establishment and consequently causing retaliations. This tension constitutes another vital component in understanding the meaning of 'secularisation' in the Communist revolutionary context. However, despite the political and historical complexity in pushing through the land reform policy across China, the guideline principle and the utmost concern for the then CCP was to win the heart and mind of the people.

Beyond this practical concern, there also lies an idealist vision of liberation. By mobilising individuals from across the nation to engage in a discussion about international affairs and world's future, the people as a political identity could then start to acquire its connotation and subjectivity as the 'drive behind the making of world's history' (Zedong, 1991, p. 1031). The vision depicted in Third World internationalism

28 "Duochan Liangshi Duochugang Henhen Daji Yexinlang Anhui Shanxi Liaoning Renmin yi Shijixingdong Zhiyuan Zhongdong Renmin (Produce more crops and more steel in order to clamp down the wild ambition of the wolf, People from Anhui Shanxi and Liaoning supporting the Arab People with actions)," *People's Daily*, July 24 1958, page 2.

might be idealistic in the eyes of today's people, notably through the lenses of political realism and pragmatism. However, in the context of the 1950s, when the war-torn world was eagerly redeeming itself from its brutal hegemonic past, the discourse of internationalism indeed provided new hope for people who believed in the new world order depicted in the UN Charter. It is in this moment of international solidarity that the needs for redemption, transcendence, and ultimately salvation, which are usually delivered through religion, were presented to the people through political practices.

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